

SHARON CENTER SCHOOL ASSOCIATION  
A HISTORY OF THE  
FROM 1871 - 1907.

BY

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The original school-house in Sharon is said to have stood on the spot between the house formerly occupied by Dr. Tirrell and later by Dr. Bacon, now owned by Mr. Silas Poole, and the house built by Mr. Josiah Johnson, commonly known as the "Choate house", on the westerly side of North Main Street.

But the "old school-house", the oldest known to any persons now living, was situated on the north-west corner of the Congregational Church lot at the end of the present row of horse-sheds. This building was the principal school-house of the town until the new one was built on the corner of School Street. How important it was, may be understood from a statement in an obituary to Mr. Samuel Swan, a teacher in 1834 and '5, that "at the early age of seventeen years, he taught a school of eighty-three pupils".

The removal of the old school-house and the building of the new one, naturally caused a line of demarkation between the old scholars and the younger ones. Those who had attended school in the old building very properly considered themselves the original graduates of the Sharon Public School and entitled to a certain recognition from the younger ones, as members of an upper class. Moreover, Stoughtonham Institute, a private school organized by Mr. Sanford Waters Willings for the study of the higher branches of learning, was begun in 1861, and among its graduates and pupils there had arisen considerable enthusiasm and several anniversary celebrations had been held, so that by 1871, the pupils of the old public school looked



something of the contagion, and developed an impulse to draw more closely together and form a little clan of their own.

By this time also, the thinning out of the ranks by Old Father Time, the Reaper, and the consciousness of increasing years, brought about a congenial feeling of nearness among the survivors, which prompted the desire to get together once more and renew the association of school days. This pleasant feeling and the desire for fellowship culminated in the following interesting manner.

Sometime previous to 1871, Mrs. Amanda Mixson Clapp and Mrs. Hannah Lothrop Leonard, both residents of Jamaica Plain, were talking over old times at Sharon, which was the home of their youth, and of how pleasant it would be for the old schoolmates to come together again and enjoy a reunion. It was fortunate, perhaps, that Elmira S. Winship, a young lady from Sharon of a later generation, happened to be present with them, otherwise the conversation might have ended in simply this exchange of reminiscences with no more practical termination. But she, knowing the interest her mother would feel in the suggestion, took it upon herself to invite these ladies to her home in Sharon, sometime during the next summer.

And thus it came about that through the hearty approval of Mrs. Winship, the old pupils of the Center school were invited to meet at her home in Sharon, on August 9th, 1871.

The date 1844 was set upon, and all pupils who had attended the school before that time, including their families, were cordially invited to be present. Fifty invitations were extended

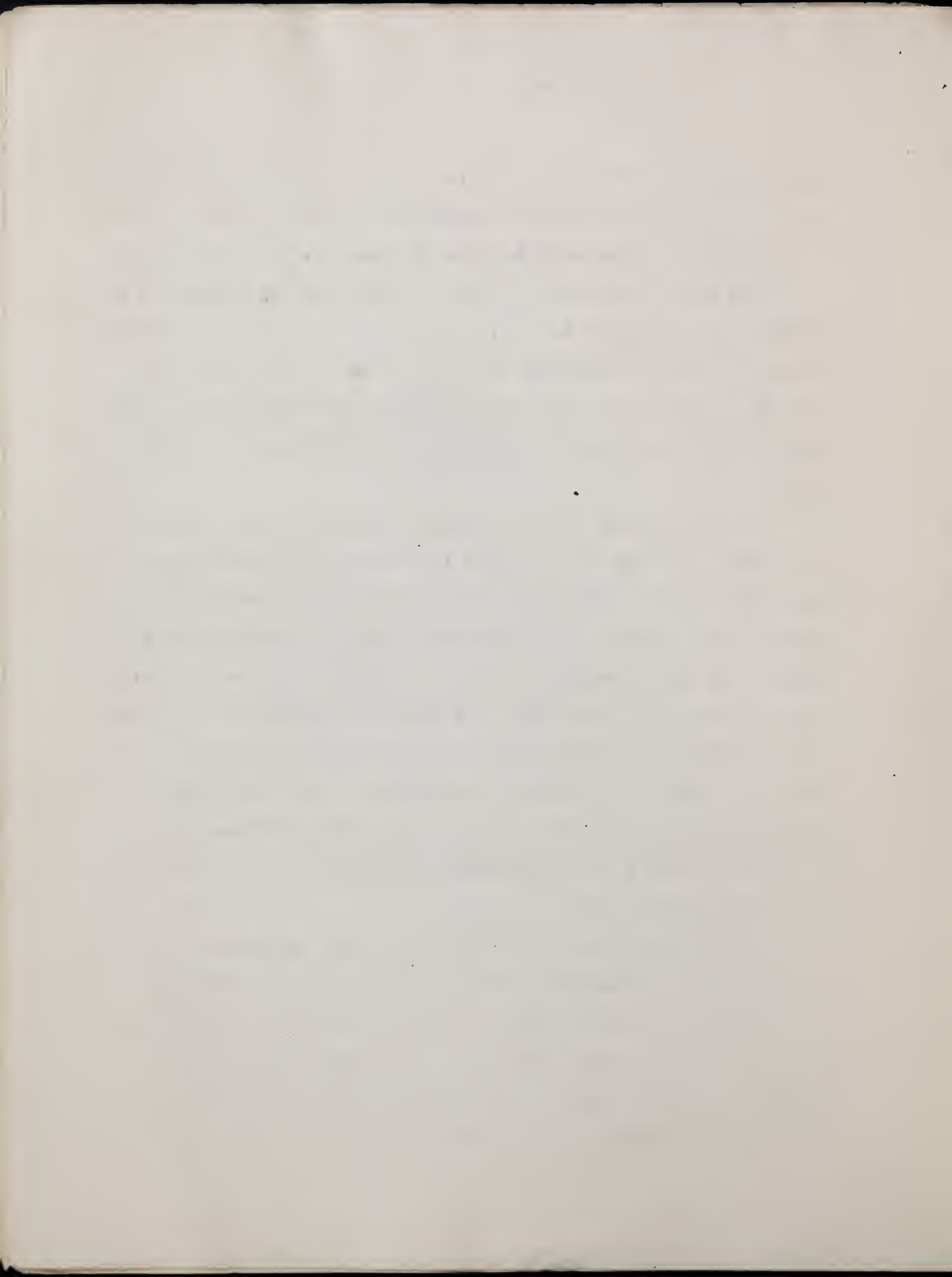




and thirty persons accepted. Among them as recalled by Mrs. Winship at the present time, were Amanda Hixson Clapp, Hannah Lothrop Leonard, Henrietta Dunbar Leonard, Sarah Dunbar Hewins, Mary Elizabeth Johnson Drake, George Dunbar, George R. Mann and his wife, Laura Johnson Mann, Elizabeth Johnson White, William R. Mann, and his wife Mary Hewins Mann, who had been both a pupil and a teacher in the school, Emily Hawes Talbot, Elizabeth Estey Hinckley, her husband and her two brothers George and Thomas Estey, Charles D. Hixson, Edwin Richards, Artemus Richards, Emily Hewins LeSeur, and several others not definitely recalled.

This gathering seems to have been entirely informal, nothing had been "cut and dried", and no permanent organization was contemplated. It was simply a pleasant reunion of old school-mates gathered together to talk over old times, and with no more serious purpose than to keep in touch with one another, and not altogether lose the kinship of youthful association. But so ready was the response to the call, and so enjoyable was the occasion, that, before separating, it was voted to meet again, and George Dunbar was appointed president and Mary E. Johnson Drake, treasurer, of an organization to be known as the Sharon Center School Association.

The name of the secretary, if one were chosen, cannot now be recalled, and there are no records known to be in existence earlier than the year 1888; but it is probable that from this time yearly meetings were held, although with no fixed organization - no By-Laws - the reunions being voted for succeeding





years from one year to another, as is the custom at the present time. The recollections of persons now living, however, serves the historian to make some mention of these earlier gatherings.

In 1872, the second meeting was held at the home of Mrs. Winship, and a collation was served in the hall in Mr. Winship's factory, and it is recalled that the servers on that occasion were the young people of the Winship and Mann families, but nothing further concerning the details of this reunion can be given.

In the absence of any records it cannot be determined just where and when the meetings for the few following years were held, but the date of the first meeting is undoubtedly correct, as a mention of it has been found in an old private diary. At some subsequent time, it was evidently voted to extend the limit of membership to include all scholars and teachers who had been connected with the old school house which was removed in 1852, but nothing is recorded. This loss should teach the younger members a lesson concerning the importance of making a record of interesting proceedings for the benefit of future generations.

Several following meetings were held, two or three at least, with Mrs. Charles D. Hixson, and another item from a private diary gives the information that in 1874 on August 20th a reunion of the Center School was again held at Mr. Charles Winship's. Memory also records a meeting at the brick house with Eliza Billings Hixson and Sarah S. Ellis in 1877, and in



1880 with Joel P. Hewins and his wife, Sarah Dunbar Hewins.

The regular records begin in 1888, when on August 30th "the Sharon Center School Association held its eighteenth annual meeting with Mr. and Mrs. Solomon Talbot", and from this date, with the exception of 1890 and 1891, the records for which are missing, there exists a complete record of all the meetings of the association copied in the book down to the present time.

At this meeting in 1888, George Dunbar of Boston, the President appointed at the first meeting in 1871, was in the chair, and Sanford Waters Billings was the secretary. The records show that sixty-eight persons were present, and at the business meeting the following officers were chosen. It will be of interest to preserve these names:

The President was,	George Dunbar	of Boston.
The Vice-Presidents were	Edwin Richards	of Sharon
	Mrs. Isaac Newton Linfield	of Stoughton
	Alden Picknell	of Foxboro
	Isaac Newton Linfield	of Stoughton
	Mrs. Fanny E. Holbrook	of Sharon
	Mrs. Edson Clapp	of Jamaica Plain
	Mrs. J. Alonzo Leonard	" "
	Mrs. Solomon Talbot	of Sharon
	Mrs. Emmons Leonard	of Sharon
	Mrs. Albert Hewins	of Sharon
	Mrs. Josiah W. Perry	of Sharon
	Samuel Swan	of Boston
	Mrs. John S. Middleton	of Sharon
	Joel Pettee	of Sharon





The Secretary was, Sanford Waters Billings of Sharon.  
The Treasurer was, Mrs. Elizabeth M. Billings "  
and there was a committee of six members.

Of these seventeen officers in 1881, the names of but six are now left standing upon the roll of membership.

An interesting feature of this meeting was the taking of a photograph of the group by Mr. J. Warren Talbot, a few copies of which are still in existence and highly prized by the fortunate owners.

The proceedings were much as they are today; a collation was served in a spacious tent; letters were read, addresses made; stories told; and songs sung.

Considerable time was occupied with the reading of resolutions upon the deaths of members during the year, and the prevailing sentiment was well expressed in the closing words of one of these resolutions; "As our ranks grow thin, let those who remain cling closer to each other."

The reunion of the following year was held on August 29th with Mrs. Corodon Spaulding at Canton. "A collection was called for and all bills, both past and present were paid", the records say. Fifty-seven persons were present "and all returned to their homes with feelings of delight", to quote again from the records.

The next recorded meeting was on August 25th, 1882, at the home of Mr. and Mrs. Deacons Leonard in Sharon. Fifty persons were present. The occasion was an enjoyable one and





extract from the secretary's report will best convey the general feeling as the friends bade one another good-bye: "The meeting, like its predecessors, was filled to the brim with delight, tinged with a shade of sadness, as we called to mind the names of those who have gone before. This will always be true at each reunion doubtless, for the ranks of our army of schoolmates and teachers must be thinned by those who, one by one, shall fall by the way. Yet we will not forsake our meetings because some are called away from our reunions on earth. We will the rather treasure their memories as they pass on before us, and more firmly and lovingly trust our indulgent Heavenly Father who tenderly leads his children. - - - - -

As the friends one after another wended their way home, it was with the promise that the reunions in days to come should not be forgotten."

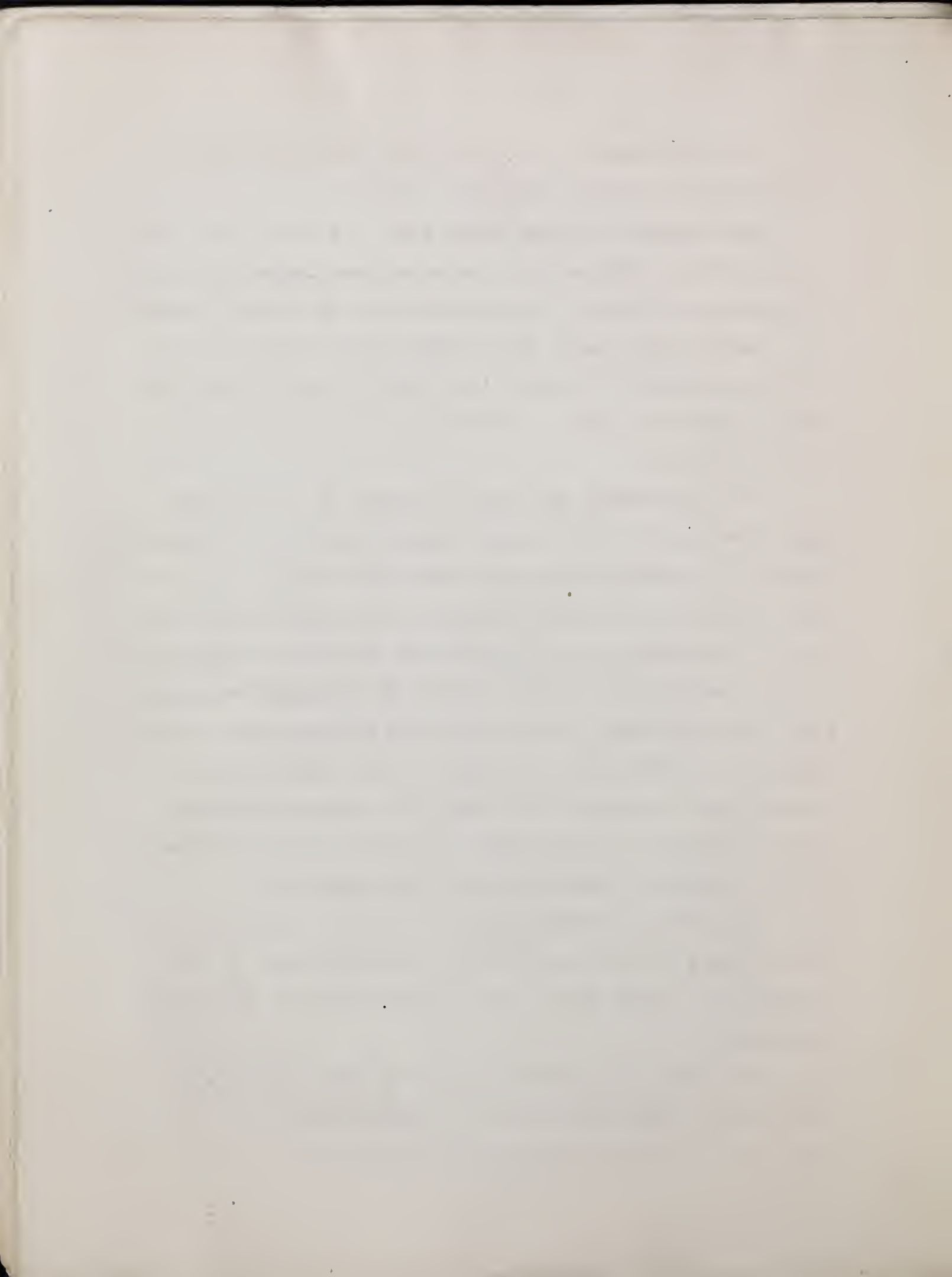
Yearly meetings are from this time recorded, but as the exercises were very much the same and but little variety appears in the character of the proceedings, no especial interest will attach to any detailed narration of the reunions for the following ten years. Here and there however, an item from the records may be referred to as indicating some change of importance. A statement of the places where the subsequent meetings were held will also enable many of the members of the association to read between the lines and recall many pleasant memories which could not be recorded in the Secretary's book.



The reunion of 1894 was held with Mr. and Mrs D. Webster Pettee in Sharon, on August 30th. It was voted "that the date of membership be extended to 1861." In a resolution offered to the memory of Mary Francis Ide Kenney it is stated that, "she was one of the four who first originated the idea and expressed a desire for these reunions, a quarter of a century ago."

On August 29th, 1896, the meeting was again held with Mr. and Mrs. Solomon Talbot. The tent was abandoned on account of the threatening weather and "the spacious barn afforded a most fitting and comfortable place for spreading the tables." Notice was taken of the death of George Dunbar, to quote from the resolutions: "Elected as our official head nearly a quarter of a century ago, his associates have shown their estimation of his fitness for the position by annually, since then, reelecting him to that office. He was loved as a schoolmate, respected as a citizen, and as our associate, highly esteemed. He manifested his interest in our association and love for his old schoolmates by (with few exceptions) being present at all our reunions."

In consequence of the death of this highly esteemed and efficient president it was feared by some that the organization must also cease to exist, but after some discussion, the vote showed that a large majority favored a continuance, and Mr. Edwin Richards was elected to fill the vacant chair, and Mr. George Richards was elected Treasurer.





The next meeting, on August 27th, 1896, was held at Canton with Mr. and Mrs. William K. Hawes.

The reunion of August 26th, 1897, was held at the Town House in Sharon, and again at the same place August 26th, 1898. At this latter meeting, Benjamin Reynolds was chosen President.

August 31st, 1899, the meeting was at Canton with Mr. and Mrs. Hawes for the second time, and on August 30th, 1900, with Mr. and Mrs. Silas A. Stone at their home on Billings Street in Sharon.

The association met again at Canton on August 29th, 1901, with Mr. and Mrs. Hawes in "Novelty Hall". At this meeting Mrs. H. Rebecca Johnson was chosen Treasurer. A composition written by N. Augusta Randall, a schoolgirl in 1849, entitled "A Description of Sharon", was read by the Secretary. As this was the last reunion recorded by the Secretary, Sanford W. ters Billings, the closing words of the record are significant: "Between four and five o'clock, school mates and friends began to separate and seek their homes, bidding one another good-bye, pledging anew their devotion, and promising that the reunion of 1902 should not be forgotten."

The average attendance at all recorded meetings up to and including the one in 1901, had been fifty-six, and the collections, though small, had been sufficient to cover all expenses.

The loss of the secretary, who so long had performed with willing hands, the work of the association, was keenly felt, and it was the general feeling that a new era had dawned,



and one which presented much uncertainty in prospect.

It was with many forebodings, therefore, that even the most hopeful of the members of the association gathered on August 28th, 1902 at "Novelty Hall" in Canton with Mr. and Mrs. Lawes.

It was very apparent that a feeling of depression bore heavily upon all present which it was difficult to shake off. But the hopeful and cheerful temperament of the lamented secretary was recalled, the encouraging words of his report of the last meeting were read, and for the second time in the history of the association the sentiment so often expressed by him - looking forward and not backward - prevailed, and it was "voted to hold further meetings". At the business meeting which followed, John G. Phillips was chosen secretary. It was voted to add ten years to the limit of membership, bringing the time down to 1871, and also voted to change the date of the next meeting to the last Thursday in July, the place to be Sharon.

Obituary notices were offered in memory of Sanford Waters Billings, the former secretary, and Edwin Richards, one of the former presidents of the association.

The attendance at this meeting is not recorded, but the collection, added to the balance from the preceding year, amounted to thirteen dollars and fifty-four cents, a hopeful sign.

With the extension of the time limit for membership,





more persons had become actively interested in the association, as it was hoped would be the result, and more money was contributed. In preceeding years, notices of meetings had been issued upon post cards, but in view of the larger outlook, the invitations to the reunion of July 30th, 1903, were in the form of a printed sheet with a cut of the old school house at the top. Special efforts were made to induce members from out of town, who had long since dissolved any connections with their old homes, to come out on this occasion and renew the acquaintances of youth. The argument to this end and expressed in the invitations was: "Let each one who may have any doubt of his welcome argue with himself thus: 'I believe they will be glad to see me for the same reason that I shall be glad to see them', and hesitate no longer. And remember that each of these opportunities missed, may possibly be repeated indeed, but can never be re-called."

The fact that this meeting would come in "Old Home Week", it was thought would also help very considerably to make the occasion attractive.

The exercises were held in the Unitarian Vestry and a tent was spread on the lawn for luncheon. Letters were read from thirteen absent members, and an original poem from one. Twelve addresses were made and there was music. Benjamin Reynolds retired from the office of President with a vote of thanks, and Edmund H. Hewins, a nephew of the first president of the association, was elected to fill his place. More than one hundred persons were present and the success of the gathering was especially





gratifying to those who had worked hard to bring it about.

The meeting of August 4th, 1904, held at the same place as that of 1903, was presided over by the Vice-President, Henry F. Talbot, in the absence of the President, and Elmira S. Winship performed the duties of Secretary in the absence of that official. Miss Winship also sent out the letter of invitation, to the closing words of which: "Come and see how good it is to breathe the pure air of Sharon, to look into the faces of old friends, to talk of happy school-days, and to speak of those who have received their promotion into another class of the Father's school", much of the interest in this reunion may be due. The dinner tables were spread in the Vestry, and the association voted to adopt the table plan for dinner, instead of the basket lunch, for the future. About one hundred and twenty-five persons were present.

Henry F. Talbot was elected President, the exercises were much as usual and the meeting adjourned with the singing of "God be with you till we meet again".

The celebration of "Old Home Week" had now become an established custom in Massachusetts and especially in Sharon these occasions, since the first one in 1902, had met with marked success to which the reunions of the Center School Association largely contributed. These reunions occupied the whole of one day and attracted many persons from out of town, and in the evening the quarterly meeting of the Historical Society added much of interest for those visitors, and the two



attractions evidently had proved a strong inducement for them to accept the opportunities offered and renew and strengthen the ties of old association.

In 1905 another letter of invitation was sent out and the printed sheet was illustrated by a second picture - a newly taken photograph of the present High School building.

On August 3rd the meeting was called to order in the Unitarian Vestry, by the President, Henry F. Talbot, and after the dinner hour had passed and the formal business proceedings had been concluded, the usual exercises of the afternoon followed. Many letters had been received from absent members, which were read and ten short addresses were made.

About one hundred and seventy persons were present, including fourteen of the oldest members of the Association, who were over eighty years of age. Reports of the reunion were printed in the Sharon and Stoughton local papers and in the Boston "Globe" and "Herald".

On August 2nd, 1906, the thirty-sixth reunion was observed. At the dinner in the Unitarian Vestry, one hundred and twenty-five persons were seated, and the tables were prettily decorated with flowers.

The afternoon program was carried out in the church above and was fully as enjoyable as usual. Perhaps the list of speakers included rather more than usual of those old schoolmates who had won success and distinction in public life, while the social side of the occasion lost none of its accustomed charm.





It was voted to add another ten years to the limit of membership, thus admitting all teachers and scholars previous to 1882, and Miss May L. Felt was added to the list of officers as Assistant Secretary. Four members were present who had attended school more than seventy years ago.

The records for several years past give evidence that one feature in the exercises which was made especially prominent in the earlier history of the association, viz: the reading of obituary notices, has become largely obsolete. It is not necessary, however, to reason from this fact that the association is less mindful of the loss which is yearly sustained through the passing away of old friends, nor that their memories are less dear than formerly to the older members, but rather that the more cheerful and hopeful spirit is prevailing over the one which formerly cast a suggestion of sadness - a sadness more manifest although no more real than now.

This history is brought down to date, but it is by no means closed.

There are now two hundred and eighty-nine names upon the roll of membership, ninety-eight from Sharon; one hundred and fifty-three from other places in Massachusetts; and seventeen other states in the Union are represented by from one to seven each.

At the present time in 1907, the association seems to



be established upon a substantial basis and the prospects appear bright.

It is thirty-six years since the first meeting was held, several of the original members are still actively enjoying the yearly reunions; many new ones have come in, and all are interested. The past of the Sharon Center School Association shows an enviable record; the future gives promise of nothing less.

*John G. Phillips*

*Sharon Aug. 1. 1907*

